

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1946

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Week of April 8, 1946

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the
complete reviews as they originally appeared
in these New York newspapers*

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Candida"

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 4, 1946

Hardwicke Steals Show in 'Candida'

Actor Makes the Most Minor Role in Revival

Who would have thought that any actor could have made the role of Mr. Burgess in Bernard Shaw's "Candida," the most interesting one in the play? Nobody could but Cedric Hardwicke. While

By
Burton
Rascoe

all the rest of the players were posturing and delivering Shavian epistles to the Romans, Ephesians and Corinthians, Mr. Hardwicke was being what he was supposed to be, an elderly bloke who didn't understand or approve

of Bernard Shaw, or anybody like him, and didn't mind saying so.

The audience had a grand time at the Cort last night. They laughed and applauded more than I should have expected at a Bernard Shaw play. I am glad they did, but I still can't see what is so good about "Candida," except Cedric Hardwicke. It still seems to me the most sentimental sort of shenanigans, with some intellectual Oscar Wildish gags thrown in, here and there.

Miss Cornell seems to get more beautiful by the minute. I never saw her lovelier than she was last night when they threw that amber light upon her countenance (she was dressed all in pink) while

Marchbanks (Mario Brando) was making love to her.

But, just the same, I have rarely witnessed any scene more ridiculous. I am glad that Bernard Shaw didn't see it. He may have acted in an unpleasant Irish manner and said things Miss Cornell would not like to hear. Candida is not supposed to deliver her lines like a sermon by Morrell. But that is what Miss Cornell did.

Nobody can ever do Marchbanks properly. He is an impossible character for any actor to play. Shaw says nobody has ever done the part to his satisfaction. How could anyone? Marchbanks

'CANDIDA.'

Play by Bernard Shaw, staged by Guthrie McClintic; presented by Katharine Cornell in association with Gilbert Miller at the Cort Theatre, Wednesday afternoon, April 3, 1946. The cast:

Miss Prosperine Garnett	Mildred Natwick
James Mavor Morrell	Wesley Addy
Alexander Mill	Oliver Cliff
Mr. Burgess	Cedric Hardwicke
Candida	Katharine Cornell
Eugene Marchbanks	Marlon Brando

is Shaw's own conception of himself. Shaw's idea is that it is a combination of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche, Samuel Butler, E. H. Sothern, John Donne, Hendrik Ibsen and Oscar Wilde.

Maybe Miss Cornell should put on pants and play Marchbanks, even if she has to wear whiskers. Mr. Brando did as well as he could as Marchbanks; but the fun we got out of the show last night was that provided by Mr. Hardwicke and Mildred Natwick.

Journal ~~the~~ American

APRIL 4, 1946

'Candida' Presented At the Cort Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Yesterday afternoon, at the Cort, the theatre came back to life, all bright and beautiful and exciting. As a blessed relief from the ancient agonies of "Antigone," Katharine Cornell, in association with Gilbert Miller, reproduced Bernard Shaw's "Candida," with herself in the title role and Cedric Hardwicke as the Mr. Burgess who is neither more or less than Alfred Doolittle against a somewhat different background.

Whether "Candida" is the best of the Shavian comedies or whether it is not, is open to argument. Personally, I prefer "Caesar and Cleopatra," "Man and Superman" and, perhaps, "You Never Can Tell." I think I do, at any rate! But there is little doubt that yesterday's revival is the play-acting public's favorite. And the play-acting ladies' too. Almost every actress of quality has taken a crack at Candy.

I, in my theatregoing days and generations, have seen as many Candidas as the next one—Dorothy Donnelly, Margaret Wycherly, Ellen Von Volkenburg, Jane Gowl, Mary Shaw, Pauline Lord, Hilda Spong, Chrystal Herne, Anne Revere, Laurette Taylor and Peggy Wood, to mention the first that come readily to mind. But, comparisons being what they are, let Miss Cornell's Candida remain the best until Miss Wood's comes back again.

Meanwhile, it behooves me to return to the Cort Theatre as of the afternoon of yesterday. And the evening of yesterday as well.

Always Marchbanks

As of the afternoon and evening of yesterday, the theatre came back to life, all bright and beautiful and shining with what is surely the most all round satisfactory performance of "Can-

dida" Broadway has so far known. Up to then, I had thought that the American Theatre Wing resuscitation four years ago at the Shubert Theatre was tops. And it was, too, with Mildred Natwick, Raymond Massey, Dudley Digges, Burgess Meredith—

And, of course, Miss Cornell. Up to then, I had thought that the Eugene Marchbanks of Mr. Meredith was the Eugene Marchbanks for whom his creator had been waiting. As a matter of fact, I remember saying so in print. But, in the late April of 1942, I had not sat in the presence of the Eugene Marchbanks of the Marlon Brando who played it yesterday. Young Mr. Brando stepped right out of the stage directions.

As even a drama critic knows, "Candida," both as a play and as a character, depends entirely, or almost entirely, on Eugene Marchbanks. To make any or all of his fellow Londoners believable, you have not only to believe in the third member of the James Mavor Morrell's eternal triangle. You have also to like him, to understand him, to put yourself in his place and live and love and suffer along with his tragic-comic ego.

More than ever am I convinced that "Candida" is first, last and always Eugene Marchbanks' story.

Superb's the Word

As a play, this Eugene Marchbanks' story has long since joined

the modern classics of the English speaking stage. Yet, after more than half a century, you—I do, even if you do not!—marvel at its wit and wisdom, its comedy and tragedy, its pathos and its bathos. Certainly it is the most sane, the most sane, the most insistently middleclass of the entire Shavian output. Candida herself is the quintessence of superior suburbia.

Or is she? Yes or no, she is the Great Good Woman of every man's wishful thinking, his mother, his wife, his sweetheart, his mistress, his housekeeper rolled into one. And that is the way Katharine Cornell projects her against the earnest humorlessness of Wesley Addy's James Morrell, the maidenly cynicism of Mildred Natwick's Prosperine Garnett and the operetta-like overaccentuation of Cedric Hardwicke's Mr. Burgess.

This is all bright. And much of it is beautiful. But the fresh excitement of the current reproduction stems straight from the Eugene Marchbanks of Marlon Brando, he of Nels Forbes in "I Remember Mama," of Sage McRae in—if I may mention it—"Truckline Cafe." Young Mr. Brando's young Mr. Marchbanks is superb. It is he and his performance that the enthusiasts at the Cort may still be cheering for all I know to the contrary.

For the third time, I'm here to tell you that the theatre is again bright and beautiful and exciting. Go see for yourself in 48th st.

APRIL 4, 1946

Marlon Brando Gives K. Cornell's 'Candida' a Pleasant Bit of Help

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Katharine Cornell's *Candida* is no novelty, for she has played this lady thrice before now; but yesterday afternoon it struck me that G. B. Shaw's "*Candida*" was something of a novelty—and a welcome one. Miss Cornell was excellent, as usual; and a new young actor named Marlon Brando managed to make something different, something a little more understandable, out of the trying role of March-

banks, the baby poet.

Mr. Brando's performance, and the presence of Cedric Hardwicke as Burgess, *Candida*'s father, lent to yesterday afternoon's revival of the play a very pleasant air.

Mr. Hardwicke, divesting himself of the icy demeanors of King Creon in "*Antigone*," has a small field day with Cockney makeup, vulgarities and accent. He is now Miss Cornell's private repertory company and a blood brother of Melville Cooper's Alfred Doolittle in "*Pygmalion*."

Quietly Stated.

The role of Marchbanks, in the

words of the little poet himself, can be "horror, horror, horror." It can be too effeminate. It can be shouted—and some of Shaw's lines in this 1903-vintage comedy should not be spoken too loudly, lest they show their age. Mr. Brando achieved a believable love-sick introvert by playing very quietly. I felt that his intensity was within him, where it should be, and not spread all around outside. For the second time this season—the first was in "*Truckline Cafe*"—the young man has shown himself a player of promise.

In the new revival Wesley Addy is a satisfactory windbag preacher, and Mildred Natwick, having some kind of patent on the role, naturally is Prossy, the prim secretary.

"*Candida*" and "*Antigone*" will divide Miss Cornell's week at the Cort Theatre. The drama advertisements will tell you which plays when.



APRIL 4, 1946

Kronenberger

The Lady Who Had to Choose

PM Reviews

Katharine Cornell's revivals of *Candida* keep turning up cyclically, like leap year. Indeed, it is almost exactly four years since the last and, to my mind, most brilliant of these

revivals. The new one, introduced at the Cort Wednesday afternoon, just isn't a patch on it. It is a production with its decided good points, and *Candida* is a play that everybody should see at least once, wherefore my thumb is turned up. But *Candida* is far from first-rate Shaw, and at this stage of its existence it calls pretty vehemently for first-rate handling. Wednesday's production, I'm afraid, showed up its faults quite as much as its virtues—though in justice to the play, I must add that I was seeing it for the fifth time and was hardly the ideal audience.

The production four years ago was particularly distinguished on two counts. The team-play of the cast as a whole was remarkable; one had the pleasure of watching the smoothest sort of ensemble acting; and in those circumstances,

Shaw's witty and wobbly comedy took on, not only a maximum of liveliness but a measure of life. Equally, that production found in Burgess Meredith the one person within anyone's recollection who made Marchbanks into both a convincing and a "bearable" figure. From the last production only Mildred Natwick and Miss Cornell herself now remain, and they come off the best. Miss Cornell's *Candida* retains most of its good qualities and its familiar effect; and Miss Natwick's Prossy at its best is as brilliant and amusing as ever.

Cedric Hardwicke, playing *Candida*'s father, made the part physically very amusing—gave it the right walk, twitch, Cockney accent; but he hardly seemed to make all he could of the lines. Wesley Addy's Morel was pretty ineffective; this did not seem the

person that so many women coddled and adored and that *Candida* (let's not let Shaw fool us) loved for more reasons than that he was "weak." There was, finally, the Marchbanks of Marlon Brando.

The role is a trial and a test, and in his own soft, poetic-looking way, Mr. Brando was at times quite effective. He always, moreover, held your interest. But the part was not altogether sustained, nor was the interpretation particularly successful.

With the cast performing no miracles, the play itself showed its age and ailments. There were scenes that dragged and scenes that defeated reality. What emerged as still enjoyable were the virtuosos and semi-farical passages, a few speeches and encounters, and the residuum of wit.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The Sun

APRIL 4, 1946

Katharine Cornell Again Plays Beautifully in 'Candida,' Revived at Cort.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The pleasant practice of bringing Bernard Shaw's "*Candida*" to the stage of New York began on a December afternoon in 1903, Broadway at 29th street, and now, after all these years, this Shavian comedy is one that is still welcome. Katharine Cornell revived the play yesterday with an opening matinee at the Cort.

This new production of "*Candida*" is by no means the best that New York has seen, or that Miss Cornell has given, but "*Candida*" remains a play of sturdy materials and it is something good to have in the theater again. Miss Cornell returns to the role in which she has rendered dis-

tinguished service, and she plays it beautifully.

Back once more in her high collar, puffed sleeves and wide skirts, she dominates the play as Shaw's all-wise heroine—richly

human, tender, gentle and understanding. It is a performance of tremulous warmth, and of the quality of her playing in the presentations of 1924 and in 1942. I kept wishing yesterday afternoon that Burgess Meredith and Raymond Massey were present to play along with her.

Of the supporting players in the Cort revival, Mildred Natwick and Sir Cedric Hardwicke come off best. Miss Natwick is the Prossy, the prim, touchy, frustrated spinster, completely in love with her employer, James Mavor Morel, the clergyman and orator. It should be one of the rules for all future productions of "*Candida*" that Miss Natwick be instantly engaged for Prossy, once G. B. S. has given his consent to the production.

Sir Cedric Hardwicke is the Burgess, and plays the part with unction, gusto and Cockney ways. It has been this fine actor's protest that he has never been permitted to do character comedy in this country, the kind of comedy that brought him renown in his

native England. Well, he now has no cause to fret. Miss Cornell and Guthrie McClintic now have him in the sort of part that was his in London's "Yellow Sands" last summer, and as the rascally Burgess he enjoys himself tremendously.

Comment on the actors playing Marchbanks and Morel at the Cort must bring a note of sharp dissent. Marlon Brando isn't very successful in his projection of the poet, Marchbanks. He isn't eloquent or sympathetic or dominating or even exasperating. He is just weak. And at times he is almost inaudible. Wesley Addy is a rather boyish Morel, not at all forceful and definitely on the colorless side.

The current "*Candida*" may not hold you in its spell as it did in previous productions, but it is still a play to be seen and one quite worthy of revival. Miss Cornell makes the presentation in association with Gilbert Miller. "*Candida*" goes into the Cort repertoire along with "*Antigone*."

"Candida"—continued

The New York Times

APRIL 4, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Since "Candida" should be revived every now and then, and Katharine Cornell obviously is the one to do it, the play and the lady met again yesterday afternoon at the Cort. Justice demands a perhaps surly note that the new production does not reach the bril-

liance of the revival in 1942, but that was an unusual time and occasion. For the present, "Candida" is still Mr. Shaw's most popular play, and Candida one of Miss Cornell's best parts. One or two of her colleagues play their roles with inner enthusiasm, and those who do not, at least offer honesty of purpose. Hereafter, the revival is to split the week with "Antigone," some of the players taking part in both, some in only one-half of the repertory.

Miss Cornell, herself, is as always in "Candida," wise, human and tolerant. Although she has played the part often, she has abandoned none of her freshness. Mildred Natwick, also, has taken complete command of Prossy, the secretary, and, wry and faintly

terrified, she seems built into the keyboard of Miss Proserpine Garnett's typewriter. On this occasion, Cedric Hardwicke moves over from "Antigone" to play the part of Candida's father. His make-up is a triumph and a complete disguise, his Mr. Burgess is a tooth-sucking, winking, leisurely reprobate—and a broadly contrived character.

Wesley Addy is the Morell of the day. He gives an unemphatic performance, allowing Candida's husband to remain colorless and negative. The world always will quarrel about Marchbanks and the various interpretations possible therefor. Marion Brando emphasizes the weakness and banks the fire, the result being a somewhat monotonously intoning poet. His

version is not believable, it fails to prove, among other things, why Morell should pay any attention to him. In the direction, Guthrie McClintic often has stressed the comedy of the lines rather than the developing characters of the play. Mr. Hardwicke, for his part, offers a good many of his observations to the audience rather than to his fellow-players.

"Candida" will be performed to-night and tomorrow, with "Antigone" holding the Cort's stage in both performances Saturday. Thereafter, "Candida" will run Monday through Thursday evenings and Wednesday afternoon, and "Antigone" on Friday and Saturday evenings and Saturday afternoon.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

APRIL 4, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

Candida Resurgent

KATHARINE CORNELL, with "Antigone" still on the boards at the Cort, has seen fit to revive "Candida" at the same time. From this reviewer's standpoint, it is a very fitting decision. In a somewhat anomalous repertory system, the celebrated actress-manager is presenting a lucid and eloquent production of a modern classic to alternate with the Lewis Gallandiere adaptation of Jean Anouilh's

nod to Sophocles. The Shavian drama is good to see. Even though Burgess Meredith does not illuminate the all-important role of Marchbanks, as he did a few years ago, the show has a strong dramatic pulse and the sort of meaning that can be brought to it by innocent bystanders.

For Shaw wrote "Candida" with his heart as well as his mind. His somewhat wordy account of a lovely woman, placed in the ridiculous position of picking a pompous parson to whom she is married or an amorous weakling poet who is fifteen years her junior, has warmth and theatrical excitement. Miss Cornell, and her co-producer, Gilbert Miller, have done justice to the author of "Candida" and "St.

Joan." With the possibilities at hand for a split-week production, they have picked a fine play for revival. They have done a fine job on it.

A latter-day reduction of a celebrated drama is always likely to suffer by comparisons. It is to the great credit of the alternate at the Cort that it deserves and takes few body blows. Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who is the sensibly arrogant Creon of "Antigone," has an acting field day in the part of Candida's well-to-do father. Marion Brando is no Burgess Meredith, but he makes the final act of "Candida" exceedingly satisfying. And Mildred Natwick, as the staid stenographer, who is secretly in love with the parson, keeps the interstices in

the drama from showing too much light.

The plain fact is that "Candida" has the power to withstand the seasons. Miss Cornell never forces the title role, but she makes it glow with humor and vitality before the ending. G. B. S. wrote wisely as well as wittily in this play and the Cort offering does not belie its essential wisdom. Wesley Addy, as Morell, and Oliver Cliff, as Alexander Mill, turn in no more than adequate portrayals to a wry romantic drama, but the drama still has power. Guthrie McClintic, who should know, has staged the work with unostentatious rhythm. "Candida" should be seen by those who have already seen it, as well as neophytes.

New York Post

APRIL 4, 1946

Cornell Revives 'Candida' With Taste and Good Acting

By Vernon Rice

Judging the reception given Katharine Cornell yesterday afternoon at the Cort, the actress-manager need not worry about finding suitable plays season after season. It will be all right with her vast following if she just sets up shop with "Candida" and acts in it forever.

We were not on hand for her 1942 revival of the George Bernard Shaw classic that was done as a benefit for Army and Navy Relief, but we have seen Miss Cornell in the title role on previous occasions, and all the glowing praise she drew then, she will draw again.

There is simply nothing left to be said about Cornell's Candida, except, like rare wine, her performance becomes more rich and more mellow with the passing of time. She is beautiful to look upon, a joy to hear. She floats through the part with ease and grace, illuminating her scenes

with a warm radiance.

True to the tradition she has established for herself, the star has assembled an able cast to appear with her. From the roster of actors playing in "Antigone" she has selected Cedric Hardwicke to portray Burgess, her father; Wesley Addy to be her husband, the Rev. James Morell, and Oliver Cliff is Lexy Mill, the curate.

Brought into the fold were Mildred Natwick to create once again the role of Prossy, Morell's spinster secretary, and Marion Brando, who appeared a few

weeks ago in the ill-fated "Truck-line Cafe" and before that he played Nels in "I Remember Mama," is Marchbanks, the young poet.

Matter of Personal Interpretation
So expert are these players' performances, that any fault found would be based on a person's preconceived idea of the various roles, or a matter of personal interpretation.

Cedric Hardwicke was properly bumptious as Burgess, the material-minded father of Candida. His make-up and manner emphasized the vulgar and his playing was for comedy.

Generally, Morell is played as a rather stuffy, windbag of a parson. Wesley Addy forgot all that, and, consciously or unconsciously, made him a warm, sincere and genuine human being. Consequently, in the famous third act scene in which Morell and Marchbanks bid for Candida's love, Addy's Morell becomes the natural selection for Candida to make, not because he is the weaker of the two men but because of his disarming candor and true devotion.

Probably one of the hardest parts ever written for a man to play is Marchbanks. Shaw describes him as "A strange, shy youth of 18, slight, effeminate, with a delicate childish voice, and

a hunted, tormented expression and shrinking manner..."

Shaw practically defies an actor to play Marchbanks without causing a wave of nausea to pass through any audience. That no such thing happened yesterday afternoon is certainly to Marion Brando's credit, and he continues to be the promising young actor he was in his two previous plays. If with each revival of this play, Miss Cornell becomes more and more associated with the part of Candida, the same holds true with Mildred Natwick and the character of Prossy. She brings so much humor to Miss Proserpine Garnett, touched off with the right degree of pathos, that it is going to be hard in the future to think of one without the other.

To the minor role of Lexy, so often overlooked in casting and playing, Oliver Cliff brought a neat, deft characterization.

Guthrie McClintic directed the piece with his usual polish and taste.

"Candida" will be played to-night and tomorrow night and then on Saturday Miss Cornell will do "Antigone" both afternoon and evening. Next week Shaw's play will be done on a preparatory basis with Anouilh's adaptation of the Sophoclean tragedy.

"St. Louis Woman"

Journal  American

APRIL 1, 1946

'St. Louis Woman' Opens At Martin Beck Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

The "St. Louis Woman" which came night before last into 45th Street would be better if it got a move on. A musical play such as the musical play Edward Gross fetched to the Martin Beck Theatre Saturday should improve as scene after scene goes by. It ought to walk in the beginning, step lively in the middle, run when it gets to the end. This "St. Louis Woman" just does not do.

It's a shame. For Mr. Gross has lent his good producing name to a song-and-dance show for which Harold Arlen has composed music, Johnny Mercer has composed lyrics, Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen have composed dialogue out of the former's novel, "God Sends Sunday." Even Rouben Mamoulian has come from Hollywood to direct the piece against Lemuel Ayers' high, wide, handsome scenery.

And everything would be lovely—lovelier than it was night before last, at any rate—if the Bontemps-Cullen story didn't keep getting in the way. It's a foolish story at best. And when, along about the middle of the second act, the Biglow Brown who is Rex Ingram gets shot and dies, the "St. Louis Woman" which is a play with music, gets shot and dies along with him.

This "St. Louis Woman" sets out to be the saga of Little Augie, a high-riding jockey such as never was in Missouri, 1898. Such as never was on land or sea, as far as I can tell. But, as long as Biglow Brown, the menace who is Rex Ingram being tough about it, stands up and looks alive, the story serves. But as soon as Rex Ingram lies down and looks dead, "St. Louis Woman" wanders.

And all Howard Arlen's music, with orchestral arrangements by

Ted Royal, Allan Small, Menotti Salta and Walter Paul, cannot save it. Not even when assisted by Johnny Mercer's literate lyrics, Lemuel Ayers' beautiful back-grounds, Charles Walter's delightful dances and Rouben Mamoulian's prominent production.

The book of "St. Louis Woman" is its own worst opponent, a tactless tripper-upper.

The Pearl Bailey who came up from the Village Vanguard to dance and sing in the USO, the Pearl Bailey who came up from the USO to dance and sing in "St. Louis Woman," will be remembered after "St. Louis Woman" is gone. Hers were opening-night ovations following the completion of "A Woman's Prerogative" in the last act, "Legalize My Name" in the first. "St. Louis Woman's" woman is Pearl.

The Nicholas Brothers (Harold and Barney) dance better than they sing, sing better than they act as two men on two horses. June Hawkins, Ruby Hill and Juanita Hall are three improperly smoldering females. The others, including Rex Ingram, have themselves a time. But the plodding plot creeps up on them. Finally, that plodding plot becomes "In Old Kentucky" in black face.

Nobody is on his toe of toes

'ST. LOUIS WOMAN.'

Musical play, with music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer and book by Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen, based on the novel "God Sends Sunday," by Arna Bontemps; production directed by Rouben Mamoulian; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; dances by Charles Walters; musical director, Leon Leonardi; presented by Edward Gross at the Martin Beck Theatre Saturday, March 30, 1946. The cast:

Badfoot	Robert Pope
Little Augie	Harold Nicholas
Barney	Barney Nicholas
Lila	June Hawkins
Blum	Louis Sharp
Butterfly	Pearl Bailey
Delia Green	Ruby Hill
Biglow Brown	Rex Ingram
Ragsdale	Edward Smith
Fernbrook	Merritt Smith
Jasper	Charles Welch
The Hostess	Maudie Russell
Drum Major	J. Mario Brown
Mississippi	Milton J. Williams
Dandy Dave	Frank Green
Leah	Jessie Hall
Jackie	Joseph Eddy
Celestine	Yvonne Coleman
Peggy	Harriet Coleman
Joshua	Lorenzo Fuller
Mr. Hopkins	Michael Wood
Preacher	Orington Thompson
Waiter	Carrington Lewis

where "St. Louis Woman" is concerned. Nobody but Pearl Bailey, Bill's going-places sister. And, until done in by plotting book-makers, Rex Ingram. And, if you relish an infant phenomenon who sings "We Shall Live to Part, No Never" at the drop of a balloon, the iddy biddy kiddie who pretends to be Fieggy. "St. Louis Woman" is all dressed up and rarin' to go. Only it goes down hill all evening.

DAILY NEWS

APRIL 1, 1946

'St. Louis Woman,' a Tuneful, Gay And Well-Staged Negro Musical

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The best Negro musical in many seasons, and the best new musical of this season up to this late date (the "new" means that the classic "Show Boat" isn't counted) is "St. Louis Woman," which was presented Saturday evening at the Martin Beck.

This show is lively, smartly staged and played by attractive and friendly people. It has a number of infectious melodies by Harold Arlen and lyrics by Johnny Mercer. Mr. Arlen is one of the dwindling number of songsmiths who still believe that a man should turn out a tune, even if he has to steal it from himself, and Mr. Mercer is a lyricist who can work up a mess of words which is neither arty nor smart, but just right.

"St. Louis Woman" is what the trade calls a book show, meaning that it has a plot. The setting is St. Louis in 1898, and the story, based on a novel by Arna Bontemps titled "God Sends Sunday," concerns a jockey, a girl, a killing,

a bad-luck curse and a horse race. Once or twice the going gets a little heavy, when murder is being done and folks have to be serious about it, or when the girl gives up her jockey lover because she believes she has brought him ill fortune on the track. But these moments pass, and in the main "St. Louis Woman" is a pleasure.

Every Number a Number.

It is a pleasure, I think, because every number is a number. Each scene, each song, has been presented as though it were designed to be the best of the evening. I suppose much of the credit for this must go to Rouben Mamoulian, who directed the production; but much of it, too, belongs to those

who sing and dance and act, and to those who wrote. Nor should one forget the settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers, all of which are fine and one of which—the home of the jockey and his girl—is beautiful.

Mr. Mamoulian, the director, is at his best when he is handling the movement of groups, and in "St. Louis Woman" he has three chances for spacious effects. The first is the first-act finale—a cake-walk contest in a ballroom, in which various Negro couples compete by dancing for the huge prize cake. Here, of course, the dance direction of Charles Walters and the Arlen-Mercer song, "Cake-Walk Your Lady," are of no little help to Mr. Mamoulian. (Here, incidentally, I believe Mr. Arlen picked his own pocket. "Cake-Walk Your Lady" sounds much like his "The Eagle and Me" from "Bloomer Girl.")

Able and Amiable.

Mr. Mamoulian's second chance comes with the second-act curtain, a funeral scene, in which some of the old "Foggy and Bess" technique is useful. And the third is the third-act curtain, an exciting and intricate spectacle of a crowd watching a race from outside the fence.

The players of "St. Louis Woman" are amiable and able. The Nicholas brothers, familiar as hoofers for at least 15 years, are cast as rival jockeys, and the smaller of them, Harold, nicely reveals his ability to carry a plot and sing some songs. As dancers, the Nicholases are unrivaled in precise agility.

Ruby Hill, playing the jockey's girl, is remarkably handsome and can sing a song in a small but torchy voice. Twice during the proceedings a big, funny girl, Pearl Bailey, stops the show with lighter numbers, and June Hawkins sings a couple of laments from an aching heart. One of the nice things about "St. Louis Woman" is that anybody who is called upon to do something, be it ever so little, does his best. Thus, a very small boy sings a very small song and earns rousing applause. I'm sorry I can't do his name out from the program. Sorry, too, that whoever orchestrated Mr. Arlen's melodies is not listed, for it's a good job, and conductor Leon Leonardi and his orchestra are excellent.

"St. Louis Woman"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

APRIL 1, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

Without Diamond Rings

A DEAL of talent has been squandered on "St. Louis Woman." The credits at the Martin Beck give every promise of a beguiling entertainment. The gifted Countee Cullen collaborated on the book of the Negro musical play. Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer have forged the songs and Lemuel Ayers has devised bright turn-of-the-century settings and costumes. Moreover, Rouben Mamoulian has shaped the show to stage patterns with his well known restless inten-

city. That the net result is an indifferent and mannered song and dance fable may be disappointing, but it is a fact. There are moments of exciting theatrical alchemy in the production, but they are random and infrequent.

The basic story should have been strong enough to sustain the antics of a musical. Based on a novel by Arna Bontemps, it merely celebrates the in and out love making of a cocky little jockey and a fancy girl in the colored section of St. Louis in 1898. It permits a wide latitude of treatment, from ensemble numbers to individual turns. Unfortunately, it has inspired little more than colorful tableaux, which have the same vitality as nicely done picture postcards. Since the Arlen score fizzes up Negro melodies in far from catchy arrangements, there is no

musical buoyancy at the Martin Beck to make one overlook the pedestrian continuity. A straight rendition of W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" would have been a godsend at Saturday night's premiere.

Although it is something of a phenomenon, the Negro performers in "St. Louis Woman" must share full responsibility for an out-at-elbows offering. The Nicholas Brothers are not uncelebrated dancers, but they still have to demonstrate that they know more than the rudiments of acting. Harold, as the jockey, is so obviously ill at ease in the straight acting of the show that one shares his relief when he scampers to the top of a piano and does a fabulous split to the center of the stage. Fayard is fast on his feet, but his make-believe has all the mobility

of molasses. Meanwhile, Ruby Hill, as the St. Louis woman of the fable, looks the part without projecting it. The truth is that it is hard to give a hoot about Little Augie and Della Green.

The bright spots in the piece are incidental. Pearl Bailey pulls the show up by its shoestrings every time she makes an entrance. Her lovely poise and her cool singing of a lyric are worth watching and hearing. Rex Ingram is splendid as a sadistic saloon proprietor who puts the hex on Little Augie, and Enid Williams quite takes over a cakewalk number with her deadpan pantomime. Mamoulian has shuffled the players around the stage deftly, but the eye is quicker than the hand in "St. Louis Woman." The newest musical on Broadway reneges on its high promise.

The Sun

APRIL 1, 1946

'St. Louis Woman' Gaudy but Listless, and It Has Its Book Troubles, Too.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"St. Louis Woman," the Martin Beck's gaudy new show, offers some stunning ensemble effects and some good singing and dancing, but the score is only fair, the cast is not overpowering, and the book is laggard and frequently tiresome. Edward Gross brought the production into 45th street Saturday night.

The musical numbers and the book portions are not particularly well integrated, and the show runs down badly in the second act. It doesn't recover in the third. "St. Louis Woman" fails by a considerable margin of being a satisfactory play with music.

This all-colored period-piece

has its locale in St. Louis back in '98 and the book relates the story of the indomitable jockey Little Augie, and the tempestuous Della Green, queen of the flock at Biglow Brown's flashy bar. Augie takes Della away from the burly Biglow, only to have her walk out on him after Biglow is killed. But when

Augie proves that his luck is still with him and that he can win once more on St. Louis turf Della is his again, and all is blissful on the Mississippi's West Bank.

"St. Louis Woman" is at its best when it shakes itself free of its libretto and goes in for song and dance. The evening's outstanding number is the exhilarating Cake Walk finale of the first act. The show's troubles are not confined entirely, however, to the book. Harold Arlen has written better scores (as in "Bloomer Girl") and there are moments when he seems to have borrowed a bit from his "Bloomer Girl" music.

Johnny Mercer's lyrics are by no means outstanding for the entire evening. He has most success with his contributions to "Legalize My Name" and "A Woman's Prerogative," both sung by Pearl Bailey, a zestful performer.

Rouben Mamoulian seems certain to go on for another half century staging well-populated musical productions and he has

given "St. Louis Woman" intermittent life with his handling of some of the ensemble scenes. Charles Walters's dance direction is good and Lemuel Ayers has come along with some good settings and dazzling costumes, but the efforts of them all are still not sufficient to offset the defects of a musical play that is listless for much of the way.

The company assembled for "St. Louis Woman" is only moderately good. The nimble and diminutive Harold Nicholas, who plays Little Augie, is hardly a romantic figure and he seems much happier when he is dancing than when engaged in his sentimental scenes. Ruby Hill sings well and is quite a good-looking Della. Rex Ingram gives one of his lusty performances as the blustering Biglow Brown and when he is killed off in the second act a lot of the show dies with him. Fayard Nicholas, of the magic feet, is an agile fellow to have around.

"St. Louis Woman," for all its flamboyance, provides a rather long evening with Little Augie.

The New York Times

APRIL 1, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

There are some nice things in "St. Louis Woman," which came to the Martin Beck on Saturday, but unfortunately there are not enough of them. Like Little Augie, its leading gentleman, the new musical play is troubled by a curse, in this case the plot. With a Negro company which quite probably could dance its way to heaven, and with costumes and the outward air of a carnival, "St. Louis Woman" prefers to remain conversational. On its list of con-

tributors are such names as Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer, for music and lyrics, and Rouben Mamoulian as director, but they do not get the evening off the ground. The flesh is willing but the spirit is weak.

"St. Louis Woman" is an adaptation by Arna Bontemps and the late Countee Cullen of the former's novel, "God Sends Sunday." The year 1898 is the time, Little Augie is a jockey and the lady of the title is no better than she should be. The story tells of Augie's taking up with the St. Louis woman, the murder of her former friend, the deathbed curse which slows the jockey's horses. It is an everyday plot after the manner of "Frankie and Johnny," but the difficulty in the present case is that everyone takes it seriously. It goes blandly through all the usual steps, and is so heavy the

best will in the world cannot lighten it.

No doubt the basic trouble is that "St. Louis Woman" never fully decides what it wishes to be. Presumably the original design was to make a folk play of it, something on the order of "Porgy and Bess." The scenes, being largely of saloons, cakewalk and carnival, take it away from folk opera and put it into the classification of musical comedy. When Augie's friends are dancing and singing, it is at times good musical comedy—but then it remembers its more serious purpose, and returns to the plot. It is a hybrid affair, and unfortunate.

There are some moments of lightness, however. A first-act cakewalk is fine; it is graceful, fast and understands the use of a climax. The final scene of the

play also is staged in Mr. Mamoulian's best manner, and has the humor which, if the world were perfect, would run throughout. There also are some pleasant people taking part. A young lady named Pearl Bailey can sing a song so that it stays sung; although she is not imitating, her style is roughly on the order of Ethel Waters. Ruby Hill is attractive as the St. Louis woman, and Harold Nicholas has a serene strut as Little Augie. Since one Nicholas Brother never is around without the other, Fayard also has a part: the Nicholas' dancing has not disintegrated with the passage of time.

No one expects Mr. Arlen to write a "Stormy Weather" every time he goes to the piano, but in truth his score for "St. Louis Woman" is not his best. An occasional air is catchy, but there are no great novelties. The blend-

"St. Louis Woman"—continued

ing of composer, lyricist and singer is reached completely only twice, when Miss Bailey cries

down "Legalize My Name" and "A Woman's Prerogative." The orchestration, by a large staff, are

good. The settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers also are very good. They have brightness and

humor and obviously are ready to clothe a far brighter figure than that of "St. Louis Woman."



APRIL 1, 1946

Kronenberger 'Woman' Is a Sometime Thing

PM Reviews

St. Louis Woman begins nicely, with a beckoning and rather bright first act. There are pleasant moments in the two acts that follow, and likeable people in the company. It is also an attractive show to look at. But it runs quite sadly downhill, and doesn't as a whole come off. The reason may perhaps be found in the subtitle, which accurately describes St. Louis Woman as a "musical play." It is not a musical comedy; it has very little

dancing, no chorus lines, no regular production numbers. The burden of the evening rests on the story, as told in words and music; and the story cannot stand up under it. For the story is obvious and commonplace, with a certain folk-opera flavor, but without the proper operatic swell and excitement. It is an all-Negro period piece, in spots a "blues" piece, of the '80s, and it is made tedious from being spun out to excessive length, and made trivial from being glazed with musical-comedy icing. A real musical play would have made fewer compromises. And though the book of St. Louis Woman is the work of two very reputable Negro writers, one questions whether the kind of glib characterizations it falls back on, the kind of stock humor and melodrama, is in the Negro's best interest. Whether so or not, the triteness and long-windedness of the story prove dramatically disastrous.

First-rate music might yet have turned the tide, but Harold Arlen's songs and orchestral tags and tidbits are second-rate even for him. They are most of them romantic or at-

mospheric enough, but they lack distinction, they lack melodic urgency, they lack the excitement and cohesive power that folk drama demands. It is an agreeable score, but nothing more than that. Nor is most of it well sung: the two leading characters, Ruby Hill and Harold Nicholas, have other virtues, but their voices are weak.

The story portrays Miss Hill as Della Green, a beautiful gal of easy morals who throws over a saloon-keeper for a successful jockey called Little Augie. In a highly complicated scene, the saloon-keeper is shot by one of his old girls, but thinks he has been shot by Augie, and dies laying a curse upon him. When Augie's luck with his mounts deserts him, Della leaves him, hoping to break the jinx. The jinx, whatever the reason, is soon broken, and the lovers lose no time getting together.

It is really when St. Louis Woman takes time out from its more serious pursuits that it comes to life. It lets itself bust out dancing only once, but then it breaks into a

fine, happy cakewalk contest that has that blend of humor and style which makes the cakewalk one of the really great folk dances. The show rations its fun very skimpily, but when it lets Pearl Bailey sing a couple of sexy songs in her lusty, half-innocent, half-insinuating way, gaiety sweeps onto the stage. The finale of the show, too—though a descent into pure musical comedy—has real humor and freshness. But the show has bounce only at intervals—and then only by snubbing its more serious intentions.

Miss Hill is a stunning young woman, though hardly more of an actress than a singer. Harold Nicholas and his brother Fayard are pleasant personalities, but they were made to dance, and in St. Louis Woman they dance very little. Rex Ingram makes a good saloon-keeper, and June Hawkins, as the lady who shoots him dead, does nicely with two or three songs. A word, finally, must be said for a young lady not listed in the program whose deadpan look and wonderful motions in the cakewalk contest were a high point of the evening.—LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

New York Post

APRIL 1, 1946

'St. Louis Woman' Arrives— Fast-Paced and Never Dull

By Vernon Rice

Producers have nightmares about the kind of misfortunes that have dogged "St. Louis Woman" since the time it first went into rehearsal. They pray nightly that all the things that have happened to Edward Gross, the producer of the All-Negro musical, during this one show, won't happen to them during the course of their entire careers.

That it did open at all Saturday night at the Martin Beck was probably as much of a surprise to Mr. Gross as to anybody else, and the news that the musical is entertaining, and at times exciting stuff, will cheer him but little at this point.

Among the happenings was a change in the directors after the show went on the road for its pre-Broadway tour. Then a new choreographer was called in as well as a change in the leading lady, with a last minute switch back to Ruby Hill, who had the role in the first place. It was probably impossible to keep track of the number of times the book was rewritten.

There's a Book

Setting itself up as a musical

play, "St. Louis Woman" would have to have a book. It was written by Arna Bontemps and the late Countee Cullen, who died just before the show went into rehearsal, and was based on Mr. Bontemps' novel, "God Sends Sunday."

To get the unpleasant note of this review over with first, as it now stands, the story is pretty much ten-twenty-third, and there were times last Saturday night when it almost dragged the show down to the depths that everybody had worked so hard from which to save it. Almost, but not quite.

Laid in St. Louis in 1898, it did offer Lemuel Ayers a magnificent opportunity to design costumes and sets of bright, garish hues that captured all of the bad taste

of that era, and yet had the startling colorful effect so necessary for this kind of a musical.

It tells of Little Augie, a jockey, and his love for the St. Louis Woman, Della Green, whom he takes away from Biglow Brown. It gets pretty involved with what the shooting of Biglow by his former gal, the putting of a curse on Little Augie by Biglow as he dies, the hard luck that pursues the little jockey and his eventual triumph over misfortune and the final winning of Della.

To the Rescue

It is at this point Rouben Mamoulian, famed director of the two current hits, "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel," enters the scene and becomes the actual hero of the play.

From all appearances, he has whittled away the book as much as possible and what is left is very little but a frame upon which he can hang some of his directorial feats. He has given the show such speed that one has hardly time enough to think whether the book is any good or not, nor care. He fills his stage as much as possible and then goes to town with his use of rhythm and picturizations. After one climax is passed, you think it can never be topped by the next one, but it always is. Each scene becomes a challenge, and Mamoulian wins.

He had a fairly pliable cast to work with, and from them the director was able to wring some first-rate performances. Harold Nicholas, one of the dancing Nicholas Brothers, made a most

appealing Little Augie, while his brother, Fayard, fared well in a minor part, that of a rival jockey, Barney.

Ruby Hill, whose voice is small but sweet, was a luscious-looking Della Green, the desirable St. Louis Woman, and Rex Ingram made the villainous Biglow Brown almost plausible. June Hawkins, as Biglow's former girl friend, had some scenes right out of old-school melodrama. She didn't let them, however, get her down.

Bailey Stops the Show

It was Pearl Bailey who stole the show, as a waitress in Biglow's cafe and with her singing of the two show-stopping numbers, "Legalize My Name" and "A Woman's Prerogative." She's a comedienne with a frank admiration of sex, but she gives the impression that through her mind passes only the purest of thoughts.

Harold Arlen's score provides everything from a low-down torch number to a good old-fashioned Negro spiritual, and the love song "Come Rain or Come Shine" is destined to be a hit. With the exception of the two numbers Miss Bailey sings, Johnny Mercer's lyrics are unobtrusive.

Charles Walters didn't have much of a chance with his choreography, though his "Cake Walk Your Lady," the finale of the first act, is breath-taking in its design, movement and tempo.

"St. Louis Woman" is theatrical and many times hokey, but always it is colorful, fast-moving and never dull.

"St. Louis Woman"—continued

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 2, 1946

"St. Louis Woman" Delightful Musical

I enjoyed "St. Louis Woman" so much that, when the final curtain descended at the Martin Beck on Saturday night, I felt I should have liked to see the whole thing all over again.

Only two musicals this season have thrilled me as much as "St. Louis Woman."
—The Red Mill and the

By
Burton
Rascoe

revival of "Show Boat." "St. Louis Woman" is not to be compared to "Carousel" any more than "The Clouds" is to be compared to "Medea," but, if comparisons are in order, "St. Louis Woman" is much better than "Carmen Jones" or "Porgy and Bess," both all-Negro musicals and both, in their separate ways, very good.

Pearl Bailey should have given us more of "Legalize My Name" and "A Woman's Prerogative." (With both numbers she tore the house down—as we understand things on Broadway. She gave us encores with both; but her en-

cores were too brief; she could have given us more than a stanza—or repeats—in the time she took for curtain bows).

Enid Williams and George Thomas should have given us more of their cake walk. Miss Williams is not featured and she has no principal role; but she is a sensational dead-pan comedienne, with a delivery that is hilarious in the extreme.

Pearl Bailey and Fayard Nicholas should have given us more of their cake walk. Mr. Nicholas is of the Nicholas Brothers, old-time hoofers, who provide most of the pedal music of the evening; but he is only a foil to the comic personality of the inordinately attractive Miss Bailey.

Countee Cullen, the poet, son of a Protestant minister in Harlem, died while the musical was in rehearsal. He won't profit by, or delight in, the gay, happy, production which Rouben Mamoulian and his conferees have given this production. Everything is contagiously delightful about it.

On the score part, Harold Arlen, the composer for "Bloomer Girl," has done very well by himself. Johnny Mercer, who wrote the

lyrics, is naughty, at times, but not offensively so and Leonard Leonard, who directs the music, has a bunch of boys—including the gentleman at the drums and traps and a flutist in the deep pit—who know what real music is.

The book is based upon "God Sends Sunday," a novel by Anna Bontemps. It is about a Negro girl, in 1898, who gets a job as a singer in a low-down St. Louis night club and has a theory that she should always run with the winner. (Didn't Ralph Waldo Emerson maintain that you should always "hitch your wagon to a star"?) Ruby Hill, heroine of "St. Louis Woman," hitched her wagon to a star. And she certainly got slapped down until she married one of the half-pint Nicholas boys.

I think the whole shebang is quite beautiful and a great lot of fun. My bows go to Edward Goss, the producer; to Rouben M. Mamoulian, the director; to Lemuel Ayres, who designed the sets and costumes; to the book writers, the lyricist, the composer; to the director of the music and to the comic artist at the drums.

"The Song of Bernadette"

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 27, 1946

'The Song of Bernadette' Simple Narrative of Lourdes Miracle

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Franz Werfel's novel, "The Song of Bernadette," which first was made a movie, has now become a play which was presented at the Belasco last evening. As a piece of theatrical merchandise, to be looked upon with cold appraisal, it has drawbacks which might defeat it as a piece of merchandise—uneven casting, too deliberate a pace, the amateurish quality of some of the scenes and the characters therein.

But "The Song of Bernadette" has other qualities which tend to disarm cold appraisal—the qualities of sincerity and of good faith. It is a narrative more than it is a drama: the narrative of a 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous, a simple French peasant of the middle of the last century, who saw visions in a grotto at Lourdes. The visions were of the Virgin, and in this grotto sprang up healing waters.

Jean and Walter Kerr have adapted the Werfel history and have made of it a straight narrative of Bernadette, from the time she was a backward schoolgirl in 1858 to some years later, when the miracles of Lourdes have been

authenticated and Bernadette is now a modest nun in the convent at Nevers.

A Girl All Alone.

There is only one conflict, one point of drama, in the play—and it is scarcely a conflict in the usual sense of the term. On the one hand there is the girl, whose faith in what she has seen is unshakable and very humble. On the other hand is the disbelief of everyone else—her parents, her schoolmates, the dean of Lourdes, the mayor, the police. In the background one senses the belief, or at least the wish to believe, on the part of the townsfolk, but the throngs are always offstage. So far as the audience is concerned, Bernadette has little but herself with her, and bullying, scolding and even contempt against her.

There is considerable sameness to these scenes of bullying, scolding and contempt, as though the mayor and the police chief might change roles with the mother and the aunt without making much difference to the story; but this is occasionally the fault of casting and often the fault of Walter Kerr's direction. Mr. Kerr has so many of his people playing at the same pitch that they lose individuality.

Miss Ross Splendid.

"Song of Bernadette" is of course, about a Catholic people and a Catholic saint, but I don't regard it as a Catholic play for a special audience—and I'm not of that faith. It strikes me as a narrative, a history of a girl who did live and of a time and events which did take place; a narrative straightforwardly and honestly told and often moving. If it is for a special audience, it is not so much for one as certain faith so much as it is for an

"THE SONG OF BERNADETTE," a play by Jean and Walter Kerr from the novel by Franz Werfel, with settings by Willis Knighton, directed by Mr. Kerr and produced by Victor Farnes-Jennings and Frank McCord. The Belasco Theater with the following cast:

Sister Marie Therese Vasson	 Jean Mann
Jeanne Abadie	 Christine Bonas
Bernadette Soubirous	 Elizabeth Ross
Marie Soubirous	 Pamela Rivers
Dean Peyramale	 Kenneth Wolfe
Louis Soubirous	 Marguerite Hartline
Soubirous	 Walt Vernon
Cousine Beuchepier	 Mimi Merlan
Louis Bourdelle	 Anthony Messeri
Bernadette Casteret	 Gertrude Kinnell
Madame Salje	 Gertrude Kinnell
Antoine Nicolas	 Bruce Hall
Mayor Lacade	 Michael Vallen
Jamel	 Richard Kallen
Dr. Dessoir	 Francis Compton
Celine	 Celestia Kermore
Madame Perret	 Kay MacDonald
Mother Josephine	 Ruth Gregory

SYNOPSIS: Act I—Scene 1. A schoolroom in Lourdes, February, 1858. Scene 2. The Grotto of Massabette. Half an hour later. Scene 3. The Casket, home of the Soubirous. An hour later. Scene 4. The Casket. Two days later. Act II—Scene 1. The office of Mayor Lacade in Lourdes. Five days later. Scene 2. Dean Peyramale's parson. Two days later. Scene 3. The Grotto. The next day. Scene 4. The Grotto. That night. Act III—Scene 1. The Casket. A week later. Scene 2. The Convent at Nevers. Ten years later.

audience which will accept its episodic quality and its static nature, and find its reward in the remarkable person of Bernadette herself. As Bernadette, Elizabeth Ross is splendid. She is very believably a girl of 14, seemingly not smart, but with a pervading goodness about her. In the ecstasies of her visions she is humble, childish and again believable. She was wisely chosen. Lack of time makes it necessary to postpone discussion of other members of the company and their roles. The projected background by Willis Knighton are in key with the simplicity of the drama.

"The Song of Bernadette"—continued

The New York Times

MARCH 27, 1944

Bernadette

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The late Franz Werfel's "The Song of Bernadette" came to New York in its third form last night, as a play following a very successful book and an equally successful motion picture. Possibly the story would defeat the stage in any case; it certainly has done so in the version brought to the Belasco by Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy. Jean and Walter Kerr wrote their dramatization with unques-

tioned sincerity, but they have not been able to bring Bernadette's story to life. As a play it is long and, save for one or two moments, it is undramatic; the acting is far from a high standard; Mr. Kerr's direction seems pointed less at the professional theatre than the university.

The story takes Bernadette from the time of her first vision, through the days of her own complete faith as opposed to the doubts of others, to the time when her story has been recognized by the Church. It shows her parents, a poor miller and his wife; her sister, the neighbors, the local Dean, who, like others, is doubtful and stern. It is episodic in form, and has perhaps too many scenes, which slow the action. Some of it is repetitious, the characters having a tendency to travel

ground which has been traveled before. As drama, it fails to invite the spirit; it lacks inner persuasion.

The fault cannot lie in Bernadette, herself, as Mr. Werfel and his screen adaptors showed, nor can it be set at the feet of Elizabeth Ross, who plays her now. While she is not perfect in all her scenes, Miss Ross does manage generally to show the young, poor girl whose visions can be shaken by neither force nor argument. She is plainly made up and she acts simply. This cannot be said of many of her associates, however, some of whom roar, some of whom overaccents motions beyond credibility. Richard Karlan, as the police chief, seems a little unpleasantly like a parody of the Gestapo; Wait Vernon is completely colorless as Bernadette's father. Fran-

cis Compton gives an easy performance as the Lourdes physician, and one or two of the minor parts are believable.

"The Song of Bernadette" originated as a play at Catholic University and it is in no sense a reflection to say that it should not have sought Broadway in its present form. Were it done in the fully-right manner it obviously could be both touching and moving. The current version hints at what it might be, but it is a version which is set too mechanically upon a stage and is played with trained solemnity rather than easy grace. It seems awkward rather than fluid; it has the air that actors are waiting in the wings to say their lines rather than the neighbors of Lourdes gradually are growing to believe in Bernadette.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 27, 1944

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Dramatic Excitement

THE dramatization of "The Song of Bernadette" which has come to the Belasco has simplicity, eloquence and dignity. They are qualities which stand this stage version of the Franz Werfel novel in good stead. Jean and Walter Kerr, in their adaptation, have eschewed piety and spectacular effects for a straight dramatic narration. The latter has staged it in the same manner, as though confident that the miracle of Lourdes itself would sustain the

burden of theatrical representation. Meanwhile Elizabeth Ross, who studied under the authors at Catholic University, gives a radiant portrayal of Bernadette, in this, her first professional assignment.

It took courage on the part of Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy to bring the drama to Broadway, where it was certain to challenge invidious comparisons with the fine motion-picture version which preceded it. One may be grateful for their temerity. For "The Song of Bernadette" fills a stage with spiritual as well as mundane incidents and rises to moments of what can only be called exaltation. The play is over-long. There are scenes which allow the humanity and fervor of the action to become somewhat dissipated. But the work as a whole has re-

markable dramatic excitement and feeling. And it brings a brilliant young actress into the theater's horizon.

Miss Ross holds the ten scenes of the production in a tenuous balance. From the moment one sees her day-dreaming in a classroom, she gives the play that curious blend of the spiritual and the earthy without which it might have been a rather trying biography of a saint. The scene of her first vision in the grotto is handled with illuminating power; her reversion to a rather stupid little girl in her home is superbly modulated. As a matter of fact, the first act is altogether the best, which does not make for the best of plays. It is thanks chiefly to Miss Ross that the tumult that is caused in a quiet French town, as miracles are

performed in "the middle of the nineteenth century," of all times, holds steady attention.

The other players are sometimes good, frequently indifferent. Pamela Rivers is in the first category, as Bernadette's bewildered mother; and Keinert Wolff, as Dean Peyramale, and Francis Compton, in the part of Dr. Dozous, are fine, too. Whatever else the company does, it succeeds admirably in suggesting a French background to the action and in reflecting the movements of the central figure. Incidentally, the settings by Willis Knighton are marvelously mesmer. There is an economy of production in "The Song of Bernadette" which turns out triumphantly. One who anticipates little from the theater version of "The Song of Bernadette" will be more than pleasantly surprised.

New York Post

MARCH 27, 1944

'The Song of Bernadette' Presented on the Stage

By Vernon Rice

Reversing the usual procedure, first there was the motion picture adaptation of Franz Werfel's best-selling novel, "The Song of Bernadette," back in 1944. Now, two years later, we have the stage version, by Jean and Walter Kerr, which Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy ushered into the Belasco last night.

Inasmuch as the picture was played so extensively, it cannot escape having its effect on the reception of the play. Disappointment in the theatre audiences is bound to arise.

Sincere though the play is, and capturing the simplicity and spirit of the book as it does, it is impossible for the stage adaptation to follow Mr. Werfel's novel as com-

pletely as did the film.

For one thing, the play is stopped by the theatre's own limitations. Then too, the novel's length offers a definite barrier that is hard to overcome.

Faced with these problems, the playwrights did the only three things they could do. One, they cut out characters that were essential to the atmosphere to the

book, but were unessential to the plot of the play. Two, they cut out and telescoped many of the novel's scenes, and three, they reduced a lot of the action to mere exposition.

Exposition Fatal

Exposition, and in the case of "The Song of Bernadette," too much of it, can be fatal. All action is stopped while characters stand or sit around telling each other and the audience what has gone on or is about to happen in the wings.

It is unavoidable that a good deal of the familiar story of the little fourteen year old peasant girl of Lourdes, France, who has visions of the Virgin Mary, does take place off-stage. There is not enough time for her to have all the visitations with The Lady nor can the complete effect and mounting conflict caused by them be shown. The only way out is to talk about them.

Elizabeth Ross, making her Broadway debut, captured the complete simplicity of Werfel's Bernadette Soubirous. The com-

peiling honesty, the child-like faith and naive belief were all there.

Marjorie Hurlbut and Whit Vernon suggested, without difficulty, her plain, harassed parents; Gertrude Kinnell played with authority Bernadette's aunt and godmother, and Keinert Wolff was properly clerical in the role of Dean Peyramale. Some of the other many players were on the amateur side.

In striving for novelty, by projecting colored plates on a screen for settings, Willis Knighton, the designer, was only partially successful. It worked for his exteriors, but his interiors were hazy, and the actors could only enter and exit from left or right stage. In due time that became rather monotonous.

The play was first done at the Catholic University Theatre.

At this late date, it might have been just as well to have kept the play in the university channels. College and experimental theatres probably could find a less demanding audience.

"The Song of Bernadette"—continued



MARCH 27, 1936

'The Song of Bernadette' Makes a Fine Stage Play

By BURTON RASCOE

Intellectually, the stage version of "The Song of Bernadette," by

Jean and Walter Kerr, which Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy presented with extraordinary care at the Belasco last night, is far superior to the movie version of the Franz Werfel novel.

Emotionally it is far inferior. It hasn't any background music, which the movie provided.

Because there was no background music, a very considerable portion of the audience laughed at all the wrong places.

I don't know—and I don't think that many of us know—about that matter of the miracles of the grotto of Lourdes. All I ask is that the story may be presented to me in a way I can accept it.

That's what the authors and producers of "The Song of Bernadette" have tried to do, and I honor them for it. They have given us something almost as fine as Shaw's "Saint Joan."

The hero of the production is Ralph Brown, who designed the stage sets so that they would seem almost as good as movie sets.

Elizabeth Ross, as Bernadette, was fair but not outstanding; others were of varying degrees of competence.



MARCH 25, 1936

Kronenberger The Miracle Of Lourdes

PM Reviews

A great success as a film, *The Song of Bernadette*, does not come off very happily as a play. Jean and Walter Kerr's stage version has, to be sure, its points. It has a palpable kind of sincerity. Bernadette her-

self, particularly as acted by Elizabeth Ross, has a measure of reality. Here and there, moreover, juts up an effectively dramatic or effectively human scene. But the interest of Bernadette is too fitful, and the final effect too meager. For this failure we must partly, I think, blame the story; partly the story-telling; and partly the production.

The celebrated story of the dull little 19th-century French school-girl who spoke to the Virgin and caused a healing spring to gush forth in the grotto at Lourdes is certainly dramatic in one sense, since nothing could be more dramatic than a miracle. Yet that is visual and momentary drama; of sustained drama the story has very little. For one thing, Bernadette is rather a chronicle than a story, something with much less form than content, and perhaps with content

not altogether suited to the stage. What best lends itself to the stage in Bernadette, what creates a basis for conflict, is the incredulity and opposition of the people of Lourdes.

It is just here, however, that the story-telling pretty much falls down. The Kerrs, to begin with, have used far too many scenes to portray this incredulity and opposition; as stagecraft the effect is sprawling, and as theater, repetitious and slow. But what is perhaps as unfortunate, most of the scenes are conventionally written, with too little compulsion and excitement, and in terms of people who are seldom made either interesting or real. The best episodes of this kind are undoubtedly those between the skeptical Dean of Lourdes and Bernadette herself; these sometimes have force; but

even these need sharpening and amalgamating. The play, indeed, with its ten scenes, has all the shapelessness of a chronicle, all the earmarks of something made from a novel rather than internally evolved. It is slack theater and rather muffled spiritual drama. Only the figure of Bernadette herself seems to breathe.

This may be partly so because Miss Ross brings to the role something touching and believable. Francis Compton, Keinert Wolff, Pamela Rivers and one or two others offer acceptable performances, but otherwise the play suffers a great deal from the production. It is badly paced and badly acted. What needed to be interpreted with special skill and a delicate feeling for tone shows more than a touch of amateurishness.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The Sun

MARCH 27, 1936

'The Song of Bernadette,' at the Belasco, Is Not Impressive in Stage Form.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"The Song of Bernadette," a miracle play and a story of faith, turned up suddenly in New York last night, via Boston and points East, and revealed itself as a production not up to the requirements of the professional theater. Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy make the presentation at the Belasco, lately a port of refuge for misfits of the drama.

Franz Werfel's "The Song of Bernadette," first a novel of great sales totals, later a motion pic-

ture of major proportions, and now put into stage form by Jean and Walter Kerr, comes forth as

a haphazard play, affecting only in rare moments. It lacks dramatic progression and compression, and some of the acting is fiercely amateurish.

In three dawdling acts the Kerrs relate the story of the peasant girl of Lourdes to whom the vision of a beautiful lady comes from out of the rocks in the town grotto. The Lady reappears for fifteen days and the discovery of healing waters in a spring that gushes from a mudhole of the grotto wins over the skeptics. Bernadette is accepted as a saint and she eventually seeks refuge in the convent at Nevers.

"The Song of Bernadette" was undoubtedly stirring as a collegiate production—it was an offering of the Catholic University—but it is lacking in the values necessary for a successful Broadway production. The Kerrs' dramatization is a hobbling one.

The physical presentation is not one of magic and a lot of the acting is downright bad.

Elizabeth Ross, making her New York debut, is fairly effective as the backward child, Bernadette, whose faith communicates itself to thousands. There are acceptable performances from Jean Mann, as the severely doubting Sister Marie Theresa Vauzous; Keinert Wolff, as the dean who prevents the authorities from sending the girl of the miracles away to an asylum; Francis Compton, as the reasoning town doctor, and Pamela Rivers as Bernadette's spirited sister.

"The Song of Bernadette" doesn't hold together as drama or as narrative. Franz Werfel's story has won renown in other mediums but it is very unimpressive as stage fare—and as done last evening at the Belasco.

"The Song of Bernadette"—continued

Journal  American

MARCH 27, 1946

'Song of Bernadette' At Belasco Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

In spite of the fact that "The Song of Bernadette" is at what is generally spoken of as the Belasco Theatre, and the Belasco Theatre is on what is generally spoken of as Broadway, the new arrival in Forty-fourth Street is not what is generally spoken of as a play. Programs evade an out-and-out designation by announcing it as "the stage version of Franz Werfel's novel" in a dramatization by Jean and Walter Kerr.

Consequently, the professional playgoer with a report to make out, an opinion to turn in, finds himself on what is generally spoken of as a spot. If "The Song of Bernadette" is not a play, what then is it? How then should it be treated? As a biography? As a legend? As a miracle? None

of these appellations comes rightly into the drama critic's professional ken. Nor, while on the subject, into Broadway's.

Yet it is as a play that Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy have produced "The Song of Bernadette," under the direction of Walter Kerr, with settings designed by Willis Knighton, and equipment designed by Ralph Brown. It is as a play that 20 members of Actors Equity act it out on the stage of the Belasco Theatre. It is as a play that the Messrs. Payne-Jennings and McCoy invite me to see it.

So let's treat it as a play.

Call It a Play

Treating it as a play, "The Song of Bernadette" consumes three acts, twelve scenes and an entire

evening in the retelling of the story of Bernadette Soubirous, the commonplace young person of the Lourdes, which is in France. Beginning with the February day in 1858, when a vision came to her in the Grotto of Massabielle, ending with her breakdown with ill health in the convent at Nevers, the entire tale is told.

Bernadette is shown in the schoolroom surrounded by her playmates; in the grotto surrounded by her vision; in the cachot surrounded by her family; in the town hall surrounded by her enemies; in the deanery surrounded by her doubters; back in the grotto surrounded by her affirmation, and in the convent surrounded by her sisters and their Mother Superior. There we leave her!

There we leave her with neither happiness nor health, a seer without glory in her own country, a saint without recognition in her own church. And the playwrights who are yet to make a play out of Franz Werfel's novel walk out on their Bernadette reluctantly, waiting until most of the interest and some of the audience have departed from a play that never was a play and never rightly could be.

Not with a box-office on Broadway!

But It Is Not

To the professional playgoer

with a report to make out and an opinion to turn in, the Elizabeth Ross who is Bernadette and the Bernadette who is Elizabeth Ross is the one fine feature of the Franz Werfel translation at the Belasco. No matter which way you look at Miss Ross and her performance, each is notable for its simplicity, sincerity and effectiveness against odds that are truly trying.

Otherwise, the men are superior to the women. Francis Compton, brother to the address known as Pay, stands up for the honor of medicine as Dr. Dosous. Keinert Wolff, understudy to the actor known as Massey, stands up for the honor of religion as Dean Peyramale. Michael Vallon, Richard Karlan, Anthony Messuri and Bruce Hall are citizens of whom Lourdes need not be ashamed.

In Willis Knighton's projected settings, made feasible by equipment credited to Ralph Brown, the showshop has something new, exciting and, I bet my bottom dollar, iconoclastic. In Jean and Walter Kerr's dramatization of Franz Werfel's novel, Broadway has, perhaps, a biography, a legend or miracle. Of these I would not know! But I do know that, in "The Song of Bernadette," Broadway has not a play. La Soubirous' solo is out of the theatre.

"I Like It Here"

The  Sun

MARCH 23, 1946

Oscar Karlweis Can't Save 'I Like It Here,' Dull Little Play at the Golden.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Willie Kringle was introduced to Broadway last night via a dull, shaky and completely hopeless little comedy called "I Like It Here," written by A. B. Shiffren. William Cahn, who produced the early-season "Devils Galore," makes the presentation at the Golden.

You will like Willie Kringle, the handyman, as played by Oscar Karlweis, but the play will just about drive you out of the theater. "I Like It Here" concerns Willie, a naturalized American, and his adjusting influence on the household of the Merri-

weathers.

In the course of three inept acts Willie, who has been hired against the protests of the sharp-spoken Mrs. Merriweather, does the cooking and the cleaning. He fixes the plumbing, mows the lawn, polishes the furniture. He

sets the young daughter on the right course romantically, he gets the easy-going Professor Merriweather to stand up and talk back to his wife, and he finally puts the professor into politics.

Willie, given his own share of the evening's trite dialogue, is likable because Karlweis plays him. This Karlweis is a deft actor and an enormously beguiling one. Here he is again with his shyness and his charm, his accent and his timing, his engagingly hesitant speech, and his expressive hands, always in motion. In seeing "I Like It Here" you occasionally forget how silly, how banal, how skimpy the play is as you watch a good actor at work.

Karlweis is quite all there is to "I Like It Here." Bert Lytell plays the wife-dominated professor, and he doesn't do much with the part—or for it. Perhaps no actor could. Beverly Bayne has quite a trying time as the wife. Seth Arnold ambles on to do his

I LIKE IT HERE, a comedy by A. B. Shiffren. Staged by Charles K. Freeman; scenery by Ralph Alswang; produced by William Cahn. At the John Golden Theatre.
Mr. Smiley.....Seth Arnold
Captain Leroux.....John Effert
Laura Merriweather.....Marti Bryant
Matilda Merriweather.....Beverly Bayne
Sebastian Merriweather.....Bert Lytell
Brad Monroe.....William Terry
Willie Kringle.....Oscar Karlweis
David Bellows.....Donald Randolph
Laphroia Lawrence.....Ellis Baker

comic specialty. Ralph Alswang did the scenery and Charles K. Freeman directed.

"I Like It Here" is the sort of comedy that is likely to turn up in the Broadway theater on a pleasant evening in spring or a sticky one in August. It's really no play at all. Oscar Karlweis is an ingratiating actor in need of a script.

"I Like It Here"—continued

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 23, 1946

'I Like It Here' Is Its Name, but Audience Didn't

By BURTON RASCOE

Oscar Kariweiss is a very captivating performer, every nuance of whose comedy technique is a delight to watch; but not even his refreshing talent is sufficient to make as slight a soufflé as "I Like It Here," which opened at the John Golden last night, worth toying with for two hours in the

theater.

Every moment that Mr. Kariweiss is on the stage the whole atmosphere is suffused with the warm glow of his ingratiating personality. It is a personality that has sweetness in it, but it is a tart sweetness, not cloying. He is at once elfin and cultivated, a leprechaun and a man of the world. His hands are as articulate as his

vocal cords; his facial expressions are the whole tone scale on which he can strike chords with eyebrows, eyes, nose and lips; his very pauses have eloquence and point.

Other Paris Hollow.

Unfortunately, there are eight other actors in the play, all of whom receive feature billing. These players—all talented and experienced—are burdened with the thankless job of trying to act as feeders to Mr. Kariweiss when he is on stage and of trying to fill in the gaps when he is absent. The author, A. B. Shiffirin, has neglected to give them any plausible reason "or existence or any lines out of which they can make even a counterfeit of it.

Indeed, although the crucial role seems to have been written especially for Mr. Kariweiss, it is not juicy enough for him. He himself is an Austrian who had to flee from the Vienna stage upon the rise of Hitler, and who has attained ample enough acclaim in "Rosalinda" and "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" for him to like it here. His role in the Shiffirin comedy is that of a naturalized central European in refugee who is more American than most Americans and who likes it here well enough to set busily and confi-

dently about making the ideals of a democracy work.

An Admirable Crichton.

He answers an ad for a handyman inserted by the wife of a henpecked professor in a New England college town, and shows himself to be an Admirable Crichton, a jack-of-all-trades, a philosopher, a companion and cheerer-upper to the professor (Bert Lytell) and a Little Mr. Fix-it, who prevents the daughter of the house from marrying her mother's choice of a rich heel, charts the course of true love and instills enough manliness into the professor to make him the master in his own house.

This all involves a shaky bit of hokum plot structure, largely consisting of miscellaneous persons coming down stairs or entering doors, exclaiming a few words and going off-stage in a sulk or a huff. There are some amusing lines, such as Mr. Kariweiss' observation that "a rich man is only a poor man with money," and there is one funny scene in which Mr. Kariweiss and Mr. Lytell get drunk together. But I fear the storehouse is yawning for this one more hopefully than the guests and customers were last night.

Journal American

MARCH 23, 1946

'I Like It Here' Now At the Golden Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

It remains to be seen if an admirable comedian can carry an amiable comedy to success. The admirable comedian is Oscar Kariweiss. He of P. A. Keppler in "Cue for Passion," Prince Orlofsky in "Rosalinda" and S. L. Jacobowsky in "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" as far as the United States is concerned. The amiable comedy is "I Like It Here," by A. B. Shiffirin. He of "Love on Leave" as far as Broadway knows.

My answer is "No," followed by "I hope I'm wrong." An earnest, engaging and infinitely skillful funny-fellow with a distinguished European background, Mr. Kariweiss brings to his latest American characterization a wit, a wisdom and a warmth that are as welcome as they are unquestioned.

Frankly, I hate to think what "I Like It Here" and its Willie Kringle would be without his imported attributes.

With them, the new arrival at the John Golden is what used to be called a "vehicle." And still is, right here and now! "I Like It Here" is a vehicle for Oscar Kariweiss, his wit, his wisdom and his warmth, in which such more or less distinguished fellow-passengers as Bert Lytell, Beverly Bayne, Seth Arnold, Donald Randolph and William Terry are graciously permitted to go for a ride.

Sixes and Sevens

In "I Like It Here"—which was entitled "Willie Kringle" until Mr. Kariweiss balked at playing the title role—the author of "Love

on Leave" which opened and shut like a door in the Summer of 1945, sets out to tell about the servant in the house who is a combination of Mr. Manson, Mr. Fix-it and Mr. Anthony. On an August afternoon he shows up in Sebastian Merriweather's unhappy New England home.

Everybody in Sebastian Merriweather's unhappy New England home is at sixes and sevens. Sebastian is a husband in name only. Matilda is a wife right out of Philip Wylie's "Generation of Vipers." Laura is a daughter to be struck regularly, as if she were a gong. And Mr. Smedley is a hired man such as neither Connecticut, Rhode Island nor even Massachusetts ever knew.

During the three acts and four scenes of "I Like It Here," William Kringle manages to make a man out of Sebastian, a woman out of Matilda and a fiancée out of Laura. It takes no little doing on the part of Mr. Kariweiss, the actor; Mr. Shiffirin, the author; and the overall direction of Charles K. Freeman. And it is Mr. Kariweiss who finds the greatest fun. He enjoys himself all evening.

All-Kariweiss

Oscar Kariweiss has acted without singing what Elisabeth Berr-

ner and Marlene Dietrich, acted with singing in "White Horse Inn" and "I Married an Angel," and acted with but one of the three dimensions in "Two Hearts in Walts Time." To "I Like It Here" he brings the overseas momentum of such endeavors, plus the Broadway momentum of "Cue for Passion," "Rosalinda" and "Jacobowsky and the Colonel." They serve him well.

Bert Lytell is Bert Lytell acting as Mr. Kariweiss' straight man. It is a long road from "The Lone Wolf" and "The Valiant." But it is a long road which Mr. Lytell travels with dignity and charm. Beverly Bayne is as lifelike as circumstances allow. But, as written, Matilda Merriweather is definitely against her. Miss Bayne's, too, is a long road from the first screen Juliet with Francis X. Bushman as Romeo.

Of the remaining fellow passengers aboard the Oscar Kariweiss vehicle, I like the Brad Monroes of William Terry best. Seth Arnold, as the Merriweathers' unhandy handy man, is again the relentless New England rustic. John Effrat, the Captain Leroux I have practically forgotten, permits Mr. Lytell to wear his Phi Beta Kappa key...He will get it back before long, I'm afraid, although I hope that I'm mistaken!

MARCH 23, 1946

"I Like It Here"

= By HOWARD BARNES =

THE best that can be said for "I Like It Here" is that Oscar Karlweis has the leading role. In somewhat heroic fashion, the gifted actor achieves moments of rare fun in a whimsy about a handyman and his confused and unhappy employers. Even with his valiant ministrations, the new A. B. Shiffrin comedy at the John

Golden Theater has little more than a gay character and a few amusing lines. It is top-heavy with supposedly comic situations. It is so top-heavy that the rickety structure of the piece caves in with a thud in the final scene. Karlweis deserved something far better.

For time and time again he picks up the tangled threads of a plot about a hen-pecked husband, warring lovers and political capers to weave them momentarily into a delightful tapestry. In the part of an Austrian refugee who becomes something more than a man of all work in a professor's home, he is always assured and humorously believable, whether he is playing a drunk scene or managing an im-

promptu campaign for state senator. What is more triumphant still, he takes sorry dialogue and makes it sound eloquent and gets along very well indeed without any dialogue whatsoever.

As a matter of fact, his pantomime is frequently funnier than his droll delivery of lines. He can clean up and dust a New England living room with uproarious results, or serve drinks to an unsavory guest at the house with all the meaning that the situation warranted, but certainly could not have had on a printed page. It would be easy to say that Karlweis employs the trick of timing. The point is that his timing is impeccable. It is a pity to have it wasted on a show which has neither tim-

ing, direction nor sustained merriment.

Of his surrounding players, Bert Lytell alone gives him support worth watching. As the academician who is a captive in his own home until the refugee arrives, he has a hand in several captivating acting duets, but they are short, few and far between. Beverly Bayne plays the domineering wife with false ambitions for her daughter, Mardi Bryant flings herself around as the daughter and William Terry and Donald Randolph are rival suitors. At least they can learn a thing or two about acting from their distinguished colleague. Karlweis is a one-man show, with a poor play on his hands.

New York Post

MARCH 23, 1946

'I Like It Here,' a Comedy, Opens at the Golden

By Vernon Rice

A frail little piece, A. B. Shiffrin's "I Like It Here," came to the Golden last night. It was so feeble, so unsturdy, so well meaning, that one feels like a dastard of the darkest hue to lift a voice against it.

But it was such a bore. Practically anything can be overlooked and forgiven in the theatre, these days, but dullness.

And in this comedy, produced by William Cahn, there is very little that goes on that doesn't have the yawn quality about it.

There is a familiarity about the play, too; a where-have-I-seen-you-before air.

Then you remember all those little homespun, domestic plays that deal with sweet, but rather hazy fathers dominated by attractive, but silly mothers and their pretty daughters engaged to one man but who love another.

In "I Like It Here" there is also a servant who delights in singing "My Old Kentucky Home," though he isn't too far removed from the recent European terror.

He is quaint and coy, a regular Mr. Fixit, running their lives and the rest of the unfortunates that will be listed in the cast.

There is an election involving the man the daughter is engaged to and the man she really loves.

They are both candidates for the State Senate. But Mr. Fixit fixes that.

And there is the worm-turns angle. But we'll not go into that.

We'll just mention that Oscar Karlweis played Willie Kringle, the busy-body servant; Bert Lytell and Beverly Bayne were Mr. and Mrs. Sebastian Merriweather in whose home Willie found a haven; Mardi Bryant had the part of their daughter, Laura, and Donald Randolph and William

Terry (the latter of "Stage Door" movie fame) were the candidates for State Senate, unloved and loved, respectively.

The theatre shortage, it seems, is fast being alleviated.

Watch out, "Flamingo Road." Here comes "I Like It Here."

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 23, 1946

In 'I Like It Here' Mr. Karlweis Is More Amiable Than His Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Our old friend Mr. Fixit, the modest but knowing little fellow who arranges life satisfactorily for the rest of the cast of characters, is back again in a comedy called "I Like It Here," which was presented last night at the Golden Theatre. The play is not quite up to Mr. Fixit;

it is modest enough, as befits a domestic comedy, but it is not so very knowing. Some of its patter

and a few of its situations are funny, but its story development is obvious and familiar.

The best of "I Like It Here" is Oscar Karlweis, who is so amiable,

so disarming and so skillful as an actor that he can make a role seem better than it is. He is a newly-hired manservant in the home of a professor in a New England town. A refugee from middle Europe who has become a U. S. citizen, he knows more about politics and democracy than most natives—and is a good cook besides.

Mr. Karlweis has to fend for the mild professor against the profes-

sor's determined wife; he must scheme for a returned soldier against a rich lawyer, so that the daughter of the household will affiancé herself to the proper guy (guess who: ex-soldier or rich lawyer?); he must also make himself useful around the house. Mr. Karlweis does all these things very nicely, for he is a good comedian—the kind of comedian who does not need jokes to be funny.

There is, of course, a drinking scene in which the professor and his manservant become stewed enough to start an open rebellion against Mrs. Professor. It's all right—but you've seen it before. Bert Lytell plays the prof by smoking a pipe, reading obituary pages and taking off his glasses. Beverly Bayne plays his wife as though she were not quite happily wed, and the ex-soldier, the lawyer and the girl are, respectively, William Terry, Donald Randolph and Mardi Bryant.